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PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR THE GLOBAL
CONFERENCE ON THE SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL ISLAND
DEVELOPING STATES
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PREPARATIONS FOR THE GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The General Assembly, by resolution 47/189, paragraphs 1 and 2, decided to convene the first Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, in April 1994, and accepted with deep appreciation the generous offer of the Government of Barbados to host the Conference.

2. In paragraph 14 of the resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report, to be submitted to the Preparatory Committee at its organizational session, containing recommendations on an adequate preparatory process, taking into account the provisions of the resolution and the views expressed by Governments during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

I. BACKGROUND

A. General Assembly resolution 47/189

3. The preamble and operative paragraphs of General Assembly resolution 47/189 constitute the general mandate of the Conference. For the purposes of working out the organizational arrangements of the preparatory process, however, the Secretary-General has paid particular attention to paragraphs 3, 4 and 5.

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* A/CONF.167/PC/1.

4. In paragraph 3 of the resolution, the General Assembly affirms that the Conference should elaborate strategies and measures to enhance the sustainable development of small island developing States in the context of increased national and international efforts to promote sustainable and environmentally sound development worldwide.

5. In paragraph 4, the General Assembly decided that the Conference should have the following objectives:

(a) To adopt plans and programmes to support the sustainable development of small island developing States and the utilization of their marine and coastal resources, which includes meeting essential human needs, maintaining biodiversity and improving the quality of life for island people;

(b) To adopt measures that would enable small island developing States to cope effectively and creatively and in a sustainable manner with environmental changes and to mitigate the impacts on and reduce the threats posed to marine and coastal resources.

6. In the last preambular paragraph of the resolution, the General Assembly reaffirmed the recommendation in Agenda 21 that small island developing States, with the support, as appropriate, of international organizations, should develop and strengthen inter-island, regional and interregional cooperation and information exchange, including periodic regional and global meetings on the sustainable development of such States. 1/

7. In paragraph 5 of the resolution, the General Assembly also decided that the Conference, in pursuit of its objectives, should examine strategies for national and international action with a view to arriving at specific agreements and commitments by Governments and by intergovernmental organizations for defined activities to promote sustained and environmentally sound development of small island developing States; the Conference should:

(a) Review current trends in the socio-economic development of small island developing States and the prospects, constraints and further options for their sustainable development, taking into consideration the relevant programmes and recommendations in chapter 17, section G, of Agenda 21;

(b) Examine the nature and magnitude of the specific vulnerabilities of small island developing States with a view to defining and/or formulating specific indicators of vulnerability in a way that has operational applicability;

(c) Define a number of specific actions and policies relating to environmental and development planning to be undertaken by the small island developing States, with the assistance of the international community, to facilitate the sustainable development of such States;

(d) Identify the elements that small island developing States need to include in their medium- and long-term sustainable development plans, including their response strategies, taking into account the importance of integrating environmental, social and economic factors in the maintenance of cultural and

biological diversity and the conservation of endangered species and critical habitats on both land and sea;

(e) Recommend measures for enhancing the endogenous capacity of small island developing States, in particular the development of human resources and the promotion of access to environmentally sound technology for sustainable development within such States;

(f) Review whether institutional arrangements at the international level enable small island developing States to give effect to the relevant provisions of Agenda 21, and make recommendations in that regard.

8. In paragraph 6 of the resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report for the first session of the Preparatory Committee, containing a review of existing global and regional programmes of action with regard to their applicability to and their combined effect on the sustainable development of small island developing States, with specific recommendations on any changes to those programmes of action which might be needed to establish greater consistency with the principles of Agenda 21 with respect to the sustainable development of small island developing States.

B. Other resolutions relevant to the Conference

1. Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (General Assembly resolution 47/190)

9. In paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 47/190, the General Assembly called upon all concerned to implement all commitments, agreements and recommendations reached at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, especially by ensuring the provision of the means of implementation under section IV of Agenda 21, stressing in particular the importance of financial resources and mechanisms, transfer of environmentally sound technology, cooperation and capacity-building, and international institutional arrangements in order to achieve sustainable development in all countries. The General Assembly also urged Governments, organs, organizations and programmes of the United Nations system, as well as other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, to take the necessary action to give effective follow-up to the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Agenda 21 and the Non-legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of All Types of Forests, as adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. 2/

2. Specific measures in favour of island developing countries (General Assembly resolution 45/202)

10. In resolution 47/186, the General Assembly reaffirmed its resolution 45/202 and other relevant resolutions of the Assembly and of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and called for their immediate and effective implementation. The Assembly invited island developing countries to intensify further their regional and subregional cooperative arrangements, particularly to

address the problems of high-cost economies; urged relevant organizations of the United Nations system to take adequate measures to respond positively to the particular needs of island developing countries; urged the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development to strengthen its role within its mandate as the focal point for specific action at the global level in favour of island developing countries; and requested the Secretary-General to continue to monitor and review in a coordinated manner, inter alia, within the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development, and the secretariats of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the problems of island developing countries, in particular those of small island developing countries.

11. In resolution 45/202, the General Assembly welcomed efforts made by island developing countries to adopt policies that address their specific problems and took note of "Challenges and opportunities: A strategic framework", which was adopted unanimously by the Meeting of Governmental Experts of Island Developing Countries and Donor Countries and Organizations, 3/ held at United Nations Headquarters from 25 to 29 June 1990.

II. DISCUSSIONS OF ISSUES AND OBJECTIVES

12. The Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States will provide one of the first opportunities - and, in its breadth and scale, a unique opportunity - for the international community to put the agreements reached at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development into practice. Planning for and implementing sustainable development in small island developing States is a multifaceted process which calls for a truly integrated approach to environment and development. It will probably involve in some way the implementation of almost every aspect of Agenda 21, taking into account the Rio Declaration and the Statement of Forestry Principles, as well as the widest possible spectrum of actors at the local, national, regional and global levels. The Conference will be seen by many as a microcosm of the hopes, aspirations and objectives which the participants in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development strove to attain. It will also present an early opportunity to tackle many of the challenges foreseen by those participants.

13. In responding to the request of the General Assembly in paragraph 14 of resolution 47/189 for a report containing recommendations on an adequate preparatory process, the Secretary-General has undertaken a preliminary examination of all aspects of the mandate of the Conference as contained in that resolution. As has previously been noted, a considerable level of relevant activity is already in hand within the United Nations system. A significant body of expertise also exists, especially within such organizations as the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the regional commissions, which will need to be taken very carefully into account if the risk of duplication or overlap is to be avoided and the most effective use made of the 12 short months remaining until the Conference. The Secretary-General has already taken a number of steps to this end, including drawing the attention of the newly established

Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development, at its first meeting (23-25 March 1993), to the status of the Conference preparations. Arrangements are also in hand to hold an inter-agency meeting involving the secretariats of all relevant United Nations bodies as soon as possible to coordinate a United Nations system-wide approach to the preparatory process.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Organization of work

14. The Secretary-General has taken careful note of the views expressed by Governments during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. In the light of these views and in order to organize its work effectively, the Preparatory Committee may wish to examine carefully the overall objectives of the Conference as spelt out in paragraphs 4 and 5 above. The Committee may also wish, at an early stage of its work, to give some thought to the kind of specific outputs it expects from the Conference. In order to organize its work effectively, the Committee may wish to establish informal consultations/working groups to deal with specific issues/agenda items as the need arises.

15. For the preparatory process to be as effective as possible, and to avoid duplication of effort, the Preparatory Committee, at an early stage of its work, may wish to identify those areas in which ongoing activities would be supportive of the preparatory process, as well as other areas in which further work would be needed to meet the mandate of the Conference. Should the Committee determine that, in some areas, ongoing work addresses some of the basic requirements of the preparatory process, the Secretary-General suggests that the Committee decide upon the most appropriate means of fully integrating all relevant aspects of that work into the preparatory process.

B. Schedule of meetings

16. The following schedule of meetings is suggested:

17-21 June 1993	Asia/Pacific region technical meeting, Vanuatu;
June 1993	Caribbean region technical meeting;
2-13 August 1993	Preparatory Committee - substantive session;
4-15 April 1994	Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

C. Other issues

1. Regional meetings

17. In paragraph 16 of resolution 47/189, the General Assembly stressed the importance of holding regional technical meetings on the sustainable development of small island developing States as a means of preparing substantive

contributions to the Conference, and invited relevant regional and subregional bodies, in close cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and other agencies, organs, organizations and programmes of the United Nations system, to organize such meetings as soon as practicable, preferably in the first half of 1993.

18. A number of possible approaches arise in preparing for regional technical meetings of this kind. It might be helpful, for example, for them to take as the starting-point programme area G (Sustainable development of small islands) of chapter 17 of Agenda 21. The next step might be to link the activities and the means of implementation described in that programme area with those of the other programme areas of Agenda 21. This would entail a thorough examination of all 40 chapters of Agenda 21, in order to identify those programme areas, activities, enabling mechanisms and institutions that are of particular relevance and priority to the region concerned. The results of such work could then be reviewed as possible medium- and long-term activities and means of implementation, with a view to producing a possible input for a working group (see para. 14 above).

19. The work undertaken on defining the priority activities of the programme areas of Agenda 21 for the sustainable development of small island developing States could also provide the basis for identifying the nature of the assistance required of the international community in building up endogenous capacities of small island developing States, as a possible input for another working group (see para. 14 above).

20. The Preparatory Committee might wish to examine the possible modalities for integrating these regional inputs into the preparatory process to achieve maximum effectiveness.

2. Non-governmental participation in the preparatory process

21. In paragraph 18 of resolution 47/189, the General Assembly invited relevant non-governmental organizations from developed and developing countries, in particular those from small island developing States, to contribute to the Conference, within the areas of their competence and expertise, on the basis of procedures established for their accreditation to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, as recommended in paragraph 38.44 of Agenda 21.

22. As with the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the community of non-governmental organizations clearly has a major contribution to make to the deliberations of the Conference and its preparatory process and is expected to serve once again as an important channel for disseminating the results of the Conference, as well as for mobilizing public support for strengthened policies at the national and international levels.

3. Participation of developing countries in the Conference

23. The attention of the Committee is drawn to paragraph 20 of General Assembly resolution 47/189, in which the Assembly decided to establish a voluntary fund for the purpose of assisting small island developing States and the least developed countries to participate fully and effectively in the Conference and its preparatory process, and invited Governments to contribute to the fund.

IV. SECRETARIAT ARRANGEMENTS

24. In paragraph 13 of resolution 47/189 the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General, within the context of the administrative arrangements to be put in place to coordinate the implementation of Agenda 21 and the servicing of the Commission on Sustainable Development, and in close cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and other relevant organizations and programmes of the United Nations system, to establish a focal point with a senior official, at an appropriate level and with the necessary specialized expertise, to service fully the preparations for and holding of the Conference and to ensure such follow-up action as might result therefrom. In a note (A/47/753) and later in a report (A/C.5/47/88), the Secretary-General informed the General Assembly about his decision to entrust the functions related to the follow-up of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and servicing of the Commission on Sustainable Development to the newly established Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development.

25. Accordingly, it is envisaged that the technical and substantive secretariat support for the first Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States will be provided, in close cooperation with other relevant entities of the United Nations system, by the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development. The Secretary-General, in consultation with the Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development intends to designate within the Department a senior-level official, who, with the assistance of other staff members of the Department, including the secretariat of the Commission on Sustainable Development, will serve as a focal point for Member States and others involved in the preparatory work and will coordinate various inputs and contributions to this process. In addition, core secretariat arrangements for the preparatory work and the Conference itself would be reinforced through the assistance of specialists from the organizations of the United Nations system concerned.

Notes

1/ Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992, vol. I, Resolutions Adopted by the Conference (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8), resolution I, annex II, para. 17.131.

2/ See ibid., resolution 1, annexes I, II and III.

3/ A/CONF.147/5-TD/B/AC.46/4, chap. II.